

CHAPTER XI

How did
the
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and of
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originate
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THE ORIGIN OF OSIRIS

While
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THUS far we have discussed the character of Osiris as he is presented to us in the art and literature of Egypt and in the testimonies of Greek writers ; and we have found that judged by these indications he was in the main a god of vegetation and of the dead. But we have still to ask/*how~ld* the conception of such a composite deity originate ? Did it arise simply through observation of the great annual fluctuations of the seasons and a desire to explain them ? Was it a result of brooding over the mystery of external nature ? Was it the attempt of a rude philosophy to lift the veil and explore the hidden springs that set the vast machine in motion ? That man at a very early stage of his long history meditated on these things and evolved certain crude theories which partially satisfied his craving after knowledge is certain ; from such meditations of Babylonian and Phrygian sages appear to have sprung the pathetic figures of Adonis and Attis ; and from such meditations of Egyptian sages may have sprung the tragic figure of Osiris.

Yet a broad distinction seems to sever the myth and worship of Osiris from, the kindred myths and worships of Adonis and Attis. For while Adonis and Attis were minor divinities in the religion of Western Asia, completely overshadowed by the greater deities of their respective pantheons, the solemn figure of Osiris towered in solitary grandeur over all the welter of Egyptian gods, like a pyramid of his native land lit up by the last rays of the setting sun when all

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